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First-Year Law Students Win Important Case

3/29/05--Participants in Boston College Law School's Immigration Spring Break Service Trip won an important victory that will keep a refugee family together.

The Law School's Immigration Law Project announced today an important victory in a deportation case involving a man who fled the brutal Khmer Rouge as a child along with his family. Eric Averion and Kevin Santos, both first-year law students who, along with approximately twenty-seven other students, volunteered at immigrant advocacy centers throughout the country during spring break, handled the case under the supervision of Shiu-Ming Cheer, staff attorney at Catholic Charities in Los Angeles.

"The client was in danger of being deported, which presented life-threatening risks to the client's mother, who suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder ("PTSD") and struggles with prolonged bouts of depression and suicidal tendencies," said Averion.

Averion and Santos assisted in preparing the case for a court hearing: gathering evidence, conducting extensive legal research and research on PTSD, and drafting direct examination questions for the client and his mother. The questions to the client's mother required her to speak about her tragic experiences in Cambodia, her medical condition, and her thoughts about her son being removed to Cambodia. After hearing the testimony, the Department of Homeland Security attorney conceded that the client had met the "extreme hardship" standard required to prevent deportation. The judge agreed and granted the client discretionary "relief" from deportation.

"I could not be more proud of the work these students have done," said Professor Daniel Kanstroom, Director of the Human Rights Program at BC Law. "This is exactly why the Spring Break Service trip was established years ago, so that students could help with such cases and could experience both the frustrations and the immense rewards of this kind of work."

"This experience has shown us the difference that public interest legal work makes, in this case giving some of the most vulnerable people in our society the opportunity to reach the American dream," said Santos. "Having the opportunity to participate in this process has reaffirmed in us the power that we as law students have in providing assistance to those who need it the most."

The Law School's Spring Break Trips, co-sponsored by the Dean's Office and BC Law's [Public Interest Law Foundation \(PILF\)](#), allow students to work on immigration law and other public interest related cases under the direct supervision of an attorney. The trips were originally inspired and organized by students, beginning in 1988. In its first year, about ten students traveled to Florida to work with the Haitian Refugee Center and similar organizations in South Florida. This was the only placement for the first few years, until El Paso and other opportunities were added. This year, approximately 30 BC Law students participated in the trips. Placement locations include Washington, D.C., Harlingen, Texas, Eloy, Arizona, Miami, Florida, and Los Angeles, California. In various venues, many of the current supervising attorneys are former students who have gone through the program. There is also now an Indian Law Project, modeled on the Immigration program.

